

1-1-2005

Formal Convention in Verdi's Falstaff

Joseph La Rosa
Louisiana State University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/vf>



Part of the [Musicology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

La Rosa, Joseph (2005) "Formal Convention in Verdi's Falstaff," *Verdi Forum*: No. 32, Article 3.
Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/vf/vol1/iss32/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Verdi Forum by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

Formal Convention in Verdi's Falstaff

Keywords

Giuseppe Verdi, Falstaff

Formal Convention in Verdi's *Falstaff*

Joseph La Rosa

When Abramo Basevi, in his 1859 *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, pointed to a “solita forma” (“common form”) for operatic duets, he laid the foundation for a series of seminal studies that began to change our understanding of Italian operatic dramaturgy.¹ Relating Basevi’s concept to a system of versification, form, and drama, these modern studies have made it possible to combine several key aspects of nineteenth-century Italian operatic theory into a powerful analytical tool applicable to a repertory ranging from Rossini to later Verdi.² This tool has not yet been meaningfully applied to Verdi’s *Otello* and *Falstaff*, however, since by the time Verdi composed these works, he had greatly modified and often even abandoned the formal conventions of romantic opera. Nonetheless, this essay investigates three particularly interesting passages in *Falstaff* to show how the concept of the *solita forma* may be effectively used in interpreting Verdi’s final two operas.

The concept of the *solita forma* draws on musical, poetic, and dramatic parameters to distinguish an introduction (*scena*) and up to four movements (*tempo d’attacco*, slow movement, *tempo di mezzo*, and *cabaletta*) within an individual “number” (an aria, duet, or larger ensemble) as summarized in Table 1 (p. 61).³ *Falstaff* at first seems doubly removed from this musico-dramatic concept. As a comic opera—Verdi’s only one since *Un giorno di regno* of 1840—it may not be as tightly bound to formal conventions as the serious ones.⁴ Perhaps more significantly, however, *Falstaff* (as Verdi’s last opera) is more continuous in texture and thus less clearly structured by the conventions of the *solita forma* than are his earlier operas. Boito’s libretto accounts in part for this continuity, because it keeps to a minimum any extended reflective, static moments and distinct stanzas that might be set as slow movements or *cabalettas*. The orchestra in *Falstaff* also contributes to the greater structural continuity: it independently presents melodic material while

- 1 Abramo Basevi, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Florence: Tofani, 1859). Modern studies include Phillip Gossett, “Verdi, Ghislanzoni and Aida: The Uses of Convention,” *Critical Inquiry* 1 (1974): 291-334; Robert Moreen, *Integration of Text Forms and Musical Forms in Verdi’s Early Operas*, Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1975; Harold S. Powers, “La solita forma and ‘The Uses of Convention,’” *Acta musicologica* 59 (1987): 65-90; and arguing for caution in the application of this formal concept, Roger Parker, “‘Insolite forme,’ or Basevi’s Garden Path,” in *Verdi’s Middle Period (1849–1859): Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 129-146.
- 2 Scott Balthazar has traced the roots of the *solita forma* back to Giovanni Simone Mayr, a predecessor of Rossini; see his “Mayr, Rossini, and the Development of the *opera seria* Duet: Some Preliminary Conclusions,” in *I vicini di Mozart, Il teatro musicale tra sette e ottocento*, ed. Maria Teresa Muraro, Studi di musica veneta, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 1989), I:377-398.
- 3 Even choral finales tend to follow this structure, but in these finales a static section is more commonly called *pezzo concertato* or *stretta*.
- 4 See Jay Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition, 1871–1893*, Studies in Musicology, 31 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 27. Francesco Izzo [“Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* and Mid-Nineteenth-Century *Opera buffa*,” *Studi musicali* 33 (2004): 387-431] has shown that nineteenth-century comic opera has its own set of conventions (which he cleverly calls the *comica forma*). He convincingly shows that in a comic duet the *tempo d’attacco* and the slow movement are replaced by a coherent but dramaturgically more ambiguous *primo tempo* leading to a *cabaletta*. As far as I can tell, comparable structures are not found in *Falstaff*.

the protagonists sing less lyrically, thereby propelling the drama through a variety of *parlante* styles.

Table 1. The Conventional Structure of *Ottocento* Operatic Arias and Duets

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------|--|
| <i>scena</i> | verse | <i>versi sciolti</i> (irregular, non-rhyming verse of 7 and 11 syllables); may or may not be present in an ensemble |
| | music | recitative |
| | drama | kinetic |
| (in duets and ensembles) | verse | <i>versi lirici</i> (regular, rhyming verse) |
| <i>tempo d'attacco</i> | | |
| | music | lyrical or <i>parlante</i> |
| | drama | kinetic, static, or a mixture of the two |
| slow movement | verse | <i>versi lirici</i> |
| | music | lyrical, slow, and often based on mid-century lyric form (<i>a,a',b,a''/c</i>); in ensembles, culminates in ensemble singing |
| | drama | static |
| <i>tempo di mezzo</i> | verse | <i>versi lirici</i> or <i>versi sciolti</i> |
| | music | lyrical, <i>parlante</i> , or a mixture of the two |
| | drama | kinetic |
| <i>cabaletta</i> | verse | <i>versi lirici</i> |
| | music | lyrical, fast, and often based on mid-century lyric form; in ensembles, culminates in ensemble singing |
| | drama | static |

To be sure, *Falstaff* does not lack static lyrical numbers, as Fenton's Act III sonnet, Nannetta's "Sul fil d'un soffio etesio" (Act III, part 2), and the final fugue attest; but they appear as isolated moments within the opera's larger body.⁵ A more integrated type of lyricism involves the introduction of short vocal melodies, such as Falstaff's "Rubar con garbo e a tempo" in Act I, part 1 (16 mm. after rehearsal 6), and his "Buono. Ber del vin dolce" in Act III, part 1 (5 mm. after rehearsal 9). These may be explained by the structure or content of a verse alone, but I would like to go further and propose that at certain points in the opera, the emerging sequences and dramaturgical function of lyrical and non-lyrical writing exhibit many of the features of the *solita forma*.

⁵ On the formal isolation of both the sonnet and the fugue, see Emanuele Senici, "Verdi's *Falstaff* at the Fin de Siècle," *The Musical Quarterly* 85 (2001): 274-310. Senici rightly does not attempt to place either piece within the context of a formal scheme; rather his approach is broadly historical and musico-poetic.

Both Julian Budden and James Hepokoski have recognized remnants of the *solita forma* in *Falstaff*.⁶ Budden suggests a reading of Falstaff's "Honor" monologue in the end of Act I, part 1, as an aria with sections resembling both a slow movement and a *stretta*,⁷ and Hepokoski draws on the *solita forma* as a point of departure for his analysis of the Ford/Falstaff duet in Act I, part 2, showing, however, how Verdi works against, rather than with, the *solita forma* to create a dramatic effect.⁸ *Falstaff* includes additional passages based on the *solita forma*, however, for which a sufficiently strong case has not yet been made. The two most prominent ones are sung by the women—Mistress Quickly, Alice, Meg, and Nannetta. The first extends from the beginning of Act I, part 2 (rehearsal 19), through the chorus "Quel otre! Quel tino!" (rehearsal 26), and the second from the beginning of Act II, part 2 (rehearsal 26), to Falstaff's entrance (rehearsal 38);⁹ a third example is Falstaff's aforementioned "Honor" monologue (rehearsal 14 to the end of the Act I, part 1). To clarify the structures of these excerpts, I shall draw on versification, phrasing, texture,¹⁰ harmonic rhythm, tempo changes, and dramaturgy (i.e., the distinction between static and kinetic moments outlined in Table 1).

As Act I, part 2, begins, Mistress Quickly, Alice, Meg, and Nannetta make their first appearance in the opera; they are meeting in Alice's garden. Both Meg and Alice have received love letters from Falstaff; as they read these aloud to one another, they realize that the two texts are identical. Outraged, the four women plot their revenge. In Boito's libretto, as in earlier Italian librettos in general, the metric characteristics of the verse provide important clues to the scene's formal organization. The section from the initial salutation, "Alice. Meg. Nannetta," to the beginning of Falstaff's letter, "Fulgida Alice! amor t'offro," consists of *versi misti* ("mixed verses"), here an irregular combination of *quinari*, *settenari*, and *endecasillabi* (five-, seven-, and eleven-syllable verses respectively).¹¹ This introduction is followed by two interlocking dramatic strains, each in a distinct poetic meter: Falstaff's letters in *endecasillabi* with a concluding two-line salutation in *settenari* and the ladies' reactions to the letters in *quinari*.¹² (The text of the letters is italicized.)¹³

6 Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 2d ed., 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), III: 453-457; and James Hepokoski, *Giuseppe Verdi: Falstaff* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 87, 90, and 102-106.

7 Budden's observations are discussed further below.

8 Hepokoski (102-106) hints at a similar tension in the Falstaff/Alice duet in Act II, part 2.

9 All references are to Giuseppe Verdi, *Falstaff*, piano-vocal score, pl. #45547 (New York: Schirmer, 1963).

10 In "aria texture," as derived from Basevi and defined in Moreen (29-30), "the melodic organization is carried on entirely by the voice, and the orchestra is reduced to continuous accompaniment. The voice part may be doubled by the orchestra, but this is different ... from a passage of *parlante melodico* where the voice doubles an orchestral melody."

11 Italian verse is counted through the syllable after the last accented syllable. In a verse of *quinari*, for example, the final accent falls on the fourth syllable. Depending on how many unaccented syllables follow the last accented syllable, the actual number of syllables in an individual verse varies. If only one unaccented syllable follows the fourth syllable, a single *quinario* contains five syllables; this normative type of verse is called *piano*. If two unaccented syllables follow the accented fourth syllable, the *quinario* actually contains six syllables altogether; this lengthened type is called *sdrucchiolo*. If the accented fourth syllable is the last syllable of the verse, the *quinario* has only four syllables; this shortened type is called *tronco*.

12 It is difficult to say exactly where the *quinari* reactions to Falstaff's letter begin. The first complete *endecasillabo* verse is split between the first words of Falstaff's letter and the women's reaction to it: "*Fulgida Alice! amor t'offro ... Ma come?*"

13 All libretto verses are cited from *Tutti i libretti di Verdi*, ed. Luigi Baldacci, 3rd ed. (Milan: Garzanti, 1984). The English translations, by Lionel Salter, are taken from Arrigo Boito, *Falstaff: A Lyrical Comedy in Three Acts*, ed. W. Beatty Kingston (New York: G. Ricordi, 1909).

Meg:*"Fulgida Alice! Amor t'offro... Ma come?"*

Che cosa dice?

Salvo che il nome

La frase è uguale.

Alice:*Fulgida Meg! amor t'offro...***Meg:***...amor bramo.***Alice:**

Qua "Meg," là "Alice."

Meg:

E tal e quale

*"Non domandar perchè, ma dimmi:..."***Alice:***t'amo.*

Pur non gli offersi

Cagion.

Meg:

Il nostro

Caso è pur strano.

Quickly:

Guardiam con flemma.

Meg:

Gli stessi versi.

Alice:

Lo stesso inchiostro.

Quickly:

La stessa mano.

Nannetta:

Lo stesso stemma.

Alice, Meg:*Sei la gaia comare, il compar gaio**Son io, e fra noi due facciamo il paio.***Alice:**

Già.

Nannetta:

Lui, lei, te.

Quickly:

Un paio in tre.

Alice:*Facciamo il paio in un amor ridente***Meg:***Enchanting Alice, I offer you love...But
what's this?*

What's he saying?

Except for the name,

the wording is the same.

Alice:*Enchanting Meg, I offer you love...***Meg:***...and I yearn for love.***Alice:**

Here "Meg," there "Alice."

Meg:

Word for word.

*"Ask not why, but say to me:..."***Alice:***I love you.*But yet I never gave him
cause.**Meg:**

Our situation

is a strange one.

Quickly:

Let's look at the letters calmly.

Meg:

The same verses.

Alice:

The same ink.

Quickly:

The same writing.

Nannetta:

The same crest.

Alice, Meg:*You are a merry wife, I a merry**companion: Let us two make a pair.***Alice:**

That's it.

Nannetta:

He, she, and you.

Quickly:

A pair of three.

Alice:*Let's make a pair in happy love*

di donna bella e d'uomo...

Tutte:

...appariscente...

Alice:

*Ma il viso tuo su me risplenderà
Come una stella sull'immensità.*

Tutte:

Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!

Alice:

*Rispondi al tuo scudiere,
John Falstaff Cavaliere.*

of a lovely woman and a man...

All:

...of distinction...

Alice:

*But your face will shine upon me
Like a star upon the vasty deep.*

All:

Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Alice:

*Reply to your own true knight
Sir John Falstaff.*

After reading the letters, the ladies declare that they must avenge Falstaff's affront; the text changes from *quinari* to *misti*.

Quickly:

Mostro!

Alice:

Dobbiam gabbarlo.

Nannetta:

E farne chiasso.

Alice:

E metterlo in burletta.

Nannetta:

Oh! Oh! che spasso!

Quickly:

Che allegria!

Meg:

Che vendetta!

Quickly:

Monster!

Alice:

We must lead him on.

Nannetta:

And make sport of it.

Alice:

And make a fool of him.

Nannetta:

Oh! Oh! what fun!

Quickly:

What amusement!

Meg:

What revenge!

The subsequent chorus "Quell'otre! quel tino!" offers an extended affirmation of the ladies' disgust. Consisting of *senari* (six-syllable verses), its first four lines are included here; it continues until the departure of the women and the entrance of Ford, Dr. Caius, Fenton, Bardolfo, and Pistola.

*Quell'otre! quel tino!
Quel Re delle pance,
Ci ha ancora le ciance
Del bel vaghegginò.*

*That wineskin! That barrel!
That king of paunches,
who still affects the mien
of a handsome gallant.*

If we view the reading of and commentary about Falstaff's letters as distinct consecutive sections, a four-part structure emerges, defined by the alternation of regular and irregular verse, as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. The Structure of the Libretto at the Opening of Act I, Part 2

| <i>Section</i> | <i>Text</i> | <i>Poetic Meter</i> |
|----------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| 1 (rehearsal 19–21) | Alice. Meg. Nannetta. | <i>versi misti</i> (5, 7, 11) |
| 2a (rehearsal 21–23) | <i>Fulgida Alice! Amor t'offro, amor bramo!</i> (the letter) | <i>endecasillabi</i> |
| 2b (rehearsal 21–23) | Ma come? / Che cosa dice? (the ladies' commentary) | <i>quinari</i> |
| 3 (rehearsal 23–24) | Mostro! Dobbiam gabbarlo! | <i>versi misti</i> (7, 11) |
| 4 (rehearsal 24–26) | Quell'otre! quel tino! | <i>senari</i> |

In this four-part structure, changes in verse coincide with changes in melodic style. After a sparkling introductory passage for winds and horns, the *versi misti* of section 1 are set mostly in *parlante*. The vocal line is occasionally doubled by the orchestra (now including strings), but more often engages with it in a lively exchange of short melodic ideas. The setting of Falstaff's letter (section 2a) stands as a lyrical contrast to this complex texture. In a relatively slow tempo (*andante sostenuto*), and mostly in regular phrases, it is often shaped in arches and supported by clear harmonic progressions and frequent cadences. We do not perceive this setting as particularly lyrical, however, because it is interrupted by the ladies' commentary (section 2b). Marked *allegro*, the commentary reflects their astonishment through a variety of styles ranging from measured recitative ("Ma come? Che cosa dice?") to spurts of lyricism ("Pur non gli offersi cagion"). Section 3 begins with a highly fragmented vocal line, first punctuated by incisive chords in winds and brass, then with doubling by strings. In conjunction with quick harmonic rhythm and rapid modulations, the passage conveys a declamatory rather than a lyrical quality. Finally, the first verses of section 4 continue *un poco meno* in the texture of section 3 at first, before recurring *più moderato* in homophony and with periodic melodic phrases over slow harmonic rhythm (rehearsal 25–26). (The *un poco meno* section is best seen as an introduction to the *più moderato* section.)

To understand the integration of text and music in this four-part structure, we need to imagine the music for Falstaff's letters as an uninterrupted string of all of the *andante* passages between rehearsal 21 and 23, which amounts to an extended lyrical section. See Example 1 (p. 74). The setting of the letter begins in a declamatory melodic style, becomes more lyrical at "Facciamo il paio," and climaxes at "Ma il viso tuo." The heightened lyricism between "Facciamo il paio" and the letter's end is due largely to an extraordinarily rich harmonic structure, consisting of a series of applied dominant-seventh chords with several suspensions. Also crucial to the lyricism of the letter-setting is the instrumental accompaniment: English horn, paired first with flute and then with clarinet, next giving way to a more neutral string orchestra with each of the ladies' interruptions, and flowering into full orchestra including horns, bassoons, and timpani at the climax.

Less immediately apparent than the setting's harmonic and orchestral characteristics is its relationship to mid-century lyric form. It begins with two expository melodic lines a_2 ("Fulgida Alice!") [where the subscript "2" refers to the number of measures in the phrase¹⁴] and a'_3 ("Fulgida Meg!"), then features a second set of expository phrases x_3 ("Non domandar perché") and x'_4 ("Sei la gaia comare"), continues with transitional phrases b_2 and b'_2 ("Facciamo il paio" and

¹⁴ The count includes measures not present in the example but necessary when connecting the fragments. For example, a measure must be added to the first a phrase, "Fulgida Alice! amor t'offro," to accommodate the full upbeat of the parallel phrase, "Fulgida Meg! amor t'offro ... amor bramo."

“di donna bella”), and concludes with the climactic phrase c_5 (“Ma il viso tuo”).¹⁵ The form thus generated— $a_2, a'_3, x_3, x'_4, b_2, b'_2, c_5$ —is a variation of the mid-century lyric form (a_4, a'_4, b_4, c_4) common in the slow movement of an ensemble or an aria.

The resemblance to the *solita forma* now comes to light. Sections 1 and 3, with their *versi misti*, irregular phrases, and *parlante* textures, correspond to the kinetic *tempo d'attacco* and *tempo di mezzo*; section 2a, with its *versi lirici*, culminating lyricism, and similarity to mid-century lyric form, is akin to the static slow movement; and section 4, with its *versi lirici*, lively melody, and regular phrasing, parallel the *cabaletta*. Section 2b, despite its regular *quinari*, functions as the first part of the *tempo di mezzo*, superimposed on the slow movement.

Not only does this reading allow us to relate all four sections to each other on a larger structural level, but it also clarifies an important dramatic point. Falstaff intends for his letters to convey grand romantic sentiments. Boito and Verdi both acknowledge this aspiration—the former by casting the letters in regular, rhymed *endecasillabi*; the latter by setting them lyrically and in a manner resembling mid-century lyric form. Poetically and musically then, Falstaff's letter contains characteristics of a lyrical slow movement, but the ladies' interruptions prevent it from being perceived as such. In addition, the ladies' mockery of Falstaff's letter is reinforced by the poetic meter chosen for their interruptions: *quinari*, as John Black has pointed out, generally connote a more comical character than *endecasillabi*, which are used for Falstaff's letter.¹⁶ This poetic strategy neatly encapsulates the comic germ of the entire opera, namely the female characters' sabotage of Falstaff's romantic aspirations.

When determining aspects of the *solita forma* in *Falstaff*, it is necessary to dispense with the assumption that the slow movement and the *cabaletta* necessarily have to be sung by the same character or characters. In the ensemble just discussed, for instance, the slow movement is sung by Alice and Meg (or, better, through them by Falstaff himself) and the *cabaletta* by a “chorus” of all four women.¹⁷ Acceptance of this difference is important in considering the next excerpt, the beginning of Act II, part 2 (rehearsal 26-38).

As this section begins, Mistress Quickly has just returned from visiting Falstaff at the Garter Inn (Act II, part 1), where, playing on his romantic aspirations, she set him up for a bogus rendezvous with Alice later that day. In reality, the women intend to teach Falstaff a lesson through a public humiliation. Unbeknownst to the women, Ford (Alice's husband) also plans to make an appearance that afternoon with the intent of exposing the ostensible infidelity of his wife. Again taking the verse structure as the point of departure, it is possible to divide the passage into four sections. Section 1 (rehearsal 26) extends from Alice's “Presenteremo un bill, per una tassa” to Quickly's “Giunta all'Albergo della Giarrettiera.” Written in *endecasillabi*, it consists of fragmented dialogue among the three women as they greet each other.

15 Falstaff's final *parlato senza misura* salutation, “Rispondi al tuo scudiere, John Falstaff Cavaliere,” is not included in this formal outline.

16 John Black, *The Italian Romantic Libretto: A Study of Salvatore Cammarano* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984), 264.

17 An example from an earlier Verdi opera appears in Act I, scene 2, of *Ernani*, where the *tempo d'attacco* and a slow movement for Carlo and Elvira are followed by a *tempo di mezzo* and a *cabaletta* for Carlo, Elvira, and Ernani.

Alice:

Presenteremo un *bill*, per una tassa
Al parlamento, sulla gente grassa

Quickly:

Comari!

Alice:

Ebben?

Meg:

Che c'è?

Quickly:

Sarà sconfitto!

Alice:

Brava!

Quickly:

Fra poco gli farem la festa!

Alice, Meg:

Bene!

Quickly:

Piombò nel laccio a capofitto.

Alice:

Narrami tutto, lesta.

Meg:

Lesta.

Alice:

Lesta.

Alice:

Let us present a bill
In Parliament on fat men.

Quickly:

Friends!

Alice:

Well?

Meg:

What news?

Quickly:

He'll be routed!

Alice:

Hurrah!

Quickly:

We'll soon have a party for him.

Alice, Meg:

Good!

Quickly:

He fell headlong into the trap.

Alice:

Tell us everything at once.

Meg:

Hurry.

Alice:

Hurry.

Section 2 (rehearsal 27) consists of Quickly's extended account of her meeting with Falstaff, which consists of six verses of *endecasillabi*, eight of *versi misti*, and finally two of *endecasillabi* dialogue completing the rhyme scheme of Quickly's account (the letters to the right of the Italian text indicate the rhyme).

Quickly:

Giunta all'Albergo della Giarretiera

Chiedo d'essere ammessa alla
presenza

Del Cavalier, segreta messaggera.

Sir John si degna d'accordami
udienza,

M'accoglie trionfo in furfantasca
posa:

"Buon giorno, buona donna."

"Reverenza."

Quickly:

a When I arrived at the "Garter" Inn
b I asked to be admitted as a secret messenger

a to the knight's presence.
b Sir John deigned to grant me audience

c and received me condescendingly like a low-
born knave:

"Good morrow, good woman."

b "Your humble servant."

| | |
|--|---|
| A lui m'inchino molto ossequiosamente Poi passo alle notizie ghiotte. Lui beve grosso ed ogni mia massiccia Frottola inghiotte. Infin, per farla spiccia Vi crede entrambe innamorate cotte Delle bellezze sue. E lo vedrete presto ai vostri piè'. | c I curtsyed most obsequiously to him, d then passed on to my delicious news. e He gulped it down and swallowed d all my extravagant fables. e Finally, to cut it short, d he believes you both to be f madly in love with his charms. g And soon you'll see him at your feet. |
| Alice: Quando? | Alice: When? |
| Quickly: Oggi, qui, dalle due alle tre. | Quickly: Today, here, from two until three. |
| Alice, Meg: Dalle due alle tre. | Alice, Meg: From two until three. |
| Alice: Son già le due. | f It's already two o'clock. |

Alice's "Olà! Ned! Will!" initiates the kinetic section 3 (rehearsal 29), in *versi misti*, during which the women make frantic last-minute plans for Falstaff's arrival and then comfort Nannetta, who conveys the news of her father's intention to marry her to Dr. Caius.

| | |
|--|---|
| Alice: Olà! Ned! Will! Già tutto ho preparato. Portate qui la cesta del bucato. | Alice: Ho there! Ned! Will! Everything is arranged. Bring in the laundry basket. |
| Quickly: Sarà un affare guaio! | Quickly: This will be fun! |
| Alice: Nannetta, e tu non ridi? Che cos'hai? | Alice: Nannetta, you're not laughing? What's the matter? |
| Tu piangi? Che cos'hai? Dillo a tua madre. | Are you crying? What is it? Tell your mother. |
| Nannetta: Mio padre... | Nannetta: Father... |
| Alice: Ebben? | Alice: Well? |
| Nannetta: Mio padre... | Nannetta: Father... |
| Alice: Ebben? | Alice: Well? |

Nannetta:

Mio padre...

Vuole ch'io mi mariti al Dottor Cajo!

Nannetta:

Father....

Father wants me to marry Dr. Caius!

Finally, in section 4 (rehearsal 33), Alice delivers an extended affirmation of the ladies' resolve to expose Falstaff. Section 4 (like section 2) begins with *endecasillabi* (the first three verses), then follows with *versi misti* (the next six verses) and *senari* (Alice's last five verses) and concludes with dialogue (six *senari* and four *versi misti*) completing the rhyme scheme.

Alice:

Gaie comari di Windsor! è l'ora!

L'ora d'alzar la risata sonora!

L'alta risata che scoppia, che scherza,

Che sfolgora, armata

Di dardi e di sferza!

Gaie comari, festosa brigata!

Sul lieto viso

Spunti il sorriso,

Splenda del riso—l'acuto fulgor!

Favilla incendiaria

Di gioia nell'aria,

Di gioia nel cor.

A noi!—Tu la parte

Farai che ti spetta.

Meg:

Tu corri il tuo rischio

Col grosso compar.

Quickly:

Io sto alla vendetta.

Alice:

Se sbagli ti fischio.

Nannetta:

Io resto in disparte

Sull'uscio a spiar.

Alice:

E mostreremo all'uom che l'allegria

D'oneste donne ogni onestà comporta.

Fra le femine quella è la più ria

Che fa la gattamorta.

Alice:**a** Merry wives of Windsor, the time has
come!**a** The time to give way to hearty laughter,**b** loud laughter that explodes, that ridicules,**c** that blazes forth, armed**b** with barbs and lashes!**c** Merry wives, joyous band,**d** let a smile break out**d** on your happy faces,**e** let the bright gleam of laughter shine,**f** the spark that kindles**f** joy in the air,**e** joy in the heart.**g** It's up to us! You must**h** do your part.**Meg:****i** You are running a risk**j** with our fat friend.**Quickly:****h** I'll be on the lookout.**Alice:****i** If things go wrong, I'll whistle for you.**Nannetta:****g** I'll stay here**j** by the door and watch.**Alice:****l** We'll show the men that the gaiety**m** of honest women is quite proper.**l** Among women the worst is the one**m** who acts the hypocrite.

Sections 2 and 4 show further similarities. Both consist mainly of an extended block of unbroken verses delivered by a single character, and in contrast to sections 1 and 3, both are

dramatically static—Quickly recounting a past event and Alice anticipating the fun of what is to come.

The structure of the libretto is largely supported by musical parameters. The kinetic sections (1 and 3) feature either *parlante* or recitative; the static sections (2 and 4) vocal lyricism with the orchestra in a basically accompanimental role. Quickly's "Giunta all'Albergo" (section 2) consists of a series of brief, relatively independent melodic phrases (of 5 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 6 + 6 measures) followed by six measures of cadential reinforcement in which the other ladies join. The phrasing is somewhat irregular and the harmonic rhythm not particularly slow, but the passage appears lyrical due to the measured, chorale-like accompaniment, clear cadences, and phrase structure determined by the vocal part rather than the orchestra. See Example 2 (p. 75).

The lyricism of Alice's light-hearted "Gaie comari di Windsor!" (in section 4) with its lively 6/8 meter and clear four-measure phrases is particularly obvious, rounding out an entire scene complex that reflects numerous characteristics of the *solita forma*. Section 1, an active *parlante*, prepares a more lyrical passage, thus functioning as a *tempo d'attacco*; section 2, a measured narrative marked *andante*, functions as the slow movement; section 3, set in motion by Quickly's announcement that Falstaff will arrive between two and three o'clock, sparks some last-minute preparations, interrupted only by Nannetta's heartache, thus functioning as a *tempo di mezzo*; and section 4, with its fast tempo and purely reflective character releasing the accumulated tension, resembles a *cabaletta*. Verdi strengthened the allusion to a *cabaletta* by drawing on the concluding dialogue for a transition to a partial repetition sung by all except Quickly. Although here relating the entire passage to the *solita forma* does not afford the sort of specific insight found in the previous example, it does offer a framework for understanding the passage's musical and dramatic variety within a single unified structure.

The final excerpt to be considered is Falstaff's monologue "L'Onore! Ladri!" from Act I, part 1 (rehearsal 14 to the end of part 1). Bardolfo and Pistola have just disdained to deliver Falstaff's love-letters to Alice and Meg. Frustrated with his lackeys' somewhat disingenuous claims to "honor" in their contempt for his vulgar ambitions, Falstaff offers an extended commentary on the general uselessness of honor.

| L'Onore! | Honor! |
|---|--|
| Ladri! Voi state ligi all'onor vostro, voi! | You rogues! You are bound by your honor, |
| Cloache d'ignominia, quando, non sempre, noi | you sewers of baseness, when not even we can always |
| Possiam star ligi al nostro. Io stesso, sì, io, io, | be true to ours. I myself, yes, even I |
| Devo talor da un lato porre il timor di Dio | must sometimes put aside the fear of God |
| E, per necessità, sviar l'onore, usare | and, hiding my honor in my necessity, use |
| Stratagemmi ed equivoci, destreggiar, bordeggiare. | stratagems and deceptions, hedge and tack. |
| E voi, coi vostri cenci e coll'occhiata tôrta | And you, with your rags and shifty mountain-cat looks |
| Da gatto-pardo e i fetidi sghignazzi avete a scrota | and stinking sniggers, keep company with honor. |
| Il vostro Onor! Che onore?! che onor? Che onor! Che ciancia! | Your Honor! What honor?! What honor? Honor! What rubbish! |

| | |
|---|--|
| Che baia! Può l'onore riempirvi la pancia? | What a joke! Can honor fill your belly? |
| No. Può l'onor rimettervi uno stinco? Non può. | No. No. Can honor mend a broken leg? It cannot. |
| Nè un piede? No. Nè un dito? No. Nè un capello? No. | Or a foot? No. Or a finger? No. Or a hair? No. |
| L'onor non è chirurgo. Che è dunque? Una parola. | Honor is no surgeon. What is it then? A word. |
| Che c'è in questa parola? C'è dell'aria che vola. | What is in that word? Air, that flies away. |
| Bel costrutto! L'onore lo può sentir chi è morto? | A fine benefit! Can a dead man feel honor? |
| No. Vive sol coi vivi?... Neppure: perchè a torto | No. Does it exist only with the living?... Not even that, |
| Lo gonfian le lusinghe, lo corrompe l'orgoglio, | For flattery falsely inflates it, pride corrupts it, |
| L'ammorban le calunnie; e per me non ne voglio! | slanders taint it: as for me, I want none of it! |
| Ma, per tornare a voi, furfanti, ho atteso troppo, | But to return to you, you scoundrels, I've been patient too long |
| E vi discaccio. Olà! Lesti! Lesti! al galoppo! | And now I'm throwing you out. Ho there! Quick! Quick! At the gallop! |
| Al galoppo! Il capestro assai bene vi sta! | At the gallop! The noose will suit you well. |
| Ladri! Via! Via di qua! Via di qua! Via di qua! | Thieves! Out of here! Get out of here! Get out of here! |

The excerpt comes earlier in the opera than the two described above, but it is considered last because its relationship to the *solita forma* is somewhat unusual. Since the text of the monologue consists entirely of *settenari doppi* in rhymed couplets, making it impossible to structure the monologue according to poetic meter and rhyme, I shall focus on the music and the sense of the text, distinguishing lyrical from non-lyrical sections as well as Falstaff's moments of reflection from those of his active engagement with Bardolfo and Pistola.

The first fourteen measures (through "Io stesso, sì, io, io") are relatively chromatic and feature abrupt stops and starts. They consist of a succession of phrases with distinct melodic styles, proceeding from a declamatory opening in long note values to a sprightly staccato passage ("Voi state ligi"), then to a more sustained passage of wide leaps ("voi! cloache d'ignominia"), and finally to a few short-breathed, pompous self-references ("Io stesso, sì, io, io"). This disjointed, decidedly non-lyrical writing corresponds to Falstaff's insults of Bardolfo and Pistola.

At "Devo talor da un lato" (Example 3, pp. 76-78), the vocal line becomes more lyrical: chromaticism gives way to stable F-major harmony, the range narrows, the orchestra becomes accompanimental, and the phrases become more regular. The first two subsections ("Devo talor" and "E, per necessità") are symmetrical, each consisting of two four-measure phrases outlining a V-I and I-V harmonic progression respectively. The third subsection ("usare stratagemmi"), another four-measure phrase, introduces new material: it outlines a stepwise descending harmonic sequence that comes to a halt on an E pedal. This E serves as a dominant preparation of A minor, the opening key of the fourth and final subsection ("E voi, coi vostri cenci"), which in the course of its six measures loses harmonic focus and breaks down into ever shorter melodic fragments before

landing on two enormous trills and coming to a full stop on a first-inversion V_7 chord of G major. The four subsections generate an a, a', b, c structure, a clear version of mid-century lyric form, thus reflecting with greater formal clarity and lyrical stability the shift in the text from hostile ranting to more coherent reasoning. And as with Falstaff's thoughts at the end of this section, the melody and harmony propel themselves toward their eventual collapse; only the two mocking trills remain. See Example 3 (p. 78).

In the monologue's central section, "Può l'onore riempirvi la pancia?" (rehearsal 15), Falstaff offers an extended meditation on the concept of honor, abandoning the earlier insults in favor of specific reasons why honor is useless. Although some of the melodic leaps are quite wide, the often periodic phrase structure and the coherent development of the melodic material convey a sense of lyricism and unity. Firmly in G major, the first three-measure phrase (a) is freely developed (a'), returning continually to the dominant D on "no" as the rest of the line rises sequentially. This passage provides the a and a' subsections of what seems to evolve into mid-century lyric form. At "L'onore non è chirurgo," the orchestra develops the main motive from a while the melody becomes fragmented and the key unstable, making a b subsection. Only with "Bel costrutto!" at the end of b does the melody return to G major. At this point, the conventions of mid-century lyric form would require either a modified return of a or a culminating c affirming the home key of G major. Instead, the formal process begins anew: "L'onore lo può sentir chi è morto?" and "Vive sol coi vivi?" make up a and a' and "perchè a torto," the modulatory b with the orchestra once again developing a material. This time though, a c subsection follows when at "e per me non ne voglio!" Falstaff cadences strongly in G major and the full orchestra blasts out the main motive.

A three-measure transition, "Ma, per tornare a voi, furfanti," carries us into the monologue's agitated final section, "Olà! Lesti! al galoppo" (rehearsal 17), during which Falstaff kicks Bardolfo and Pistola out of the Garter Inn. The vocal line is not sustained long enough to qualify as truly lyrical, but it is relatively diatonic and not as disjunct as elsewhere in the monologue. In addition, the rhythmic and melodic two-measure groupings in the orchestra and the bipartite structure (marked by rehearsal 17 and 18) create a relatively high degree of stability in this section. Table 3 summarizes the relationship of this passage to the *solita forma*.

Table 3. The Relationship of the Conclusion of Act I, Part 1, to the *solita forma*

| <i>Section</i> | <i>Text</i> | <i>Melodic Quality</i> | <i>Form</i> | <i>Dramatic Motion</i> | <i>Formal Section</i> |
|----------------|--|------------------------|--|--|------------------------|
| 1 | L'onore! Ladri! | non-lyrical | through-composed | Falstaff insults Bardolfo and Pistola; kinetic | <i>scena</i> |
| 2 | Devo talor da un lato | lyrical, periodic | a, a', b, c (mid-century lyric form) | Falstaff begins to assert his views on honor; combination of static and kinetic elements | <i>tempo d'attacco</i> |
| 3 | Può l'onore riempirvi la pancia? | lyrical | $a, a', b; a, a', b, c$ | Falstaff meditates on the nature of honor; static | slow movement |

| | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|--------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 4 | Ma, per tornare a voi | non-lyrical | through-composed | Falstaff turns his attention back to Bardolfo and Pistola; kinetic | <i>tempo di mezzo</i> |
| 5 | Olà! Lesti! | mixture of lyrical and non-lyrical passages; regular phrases in the orchestra | bipartite (AA') | Falstaff kicks his lackeys out of the Garter Inn; kinetic | <i>cabaletta</i> |

Budden divides the monologue into similar formal sections, including an opening “*recitativo accompagnato*” (which implies a *scena*), a traditional slow movement at “Può l’onore riempirvi la pancia?” and a “*stretta* substitute,” a term he prefers over *cabaletta*.¹⁸ Regarding the opening *recitativo accompagnato*, he suggests that the “total effect would be amorphous were it not for the tiny melodic germ (‘Devo talor da un lato’) which yields a clear eight bars of periodicity of the kind that has held together so many a Verdian declamatory scene, like chainmail in a slab of reinforced concrete.”¹⁹ Budden detects a structural articulation at “Devo talor da un lato” but subsumes this more “periodic” passage within his *recitativo accompagnato* rather than considering it as a separate section. But the passage beginning at “Devo talor da un lato,” as shown above, is based on mid-century lyric form, a structure that does not normally appear in a *scena* but does appear quite commonly in a *tempo d’attacco*. Alongside the combination of static and kinetic elements—Falstaff’s initial reflection on his personal relationship with honor and subsequent lashing out at his two lackeys—the mid-century lyric form seems to confirm a reading of the passage beginning at “Devo talor da un lato” as a *tempo d’attacco*. One might object, of course, that the *tempo d’attacco* is normally lacking from solo scenes. But then by the late nineteenth century the formal conventions of the *solita forma* had broken down to a degree that borrowing a formal ensemble section for a solo monologue would no longer be surprising.

The monologue’s concluding section, “Olà! Lesti!,” features characteristics reminiscent of a *cabaletta*. After condescending to turn his attention back to his useless lackeys, Falstaff picks up a broom and chases them out of the inn. Instead of singing the *cabaletta* after the chase, however, he sings it to the chase. The orchestra provides part of the conventional repeat, and the fragmented vocal style resulting from Falstaff’s agitation is balanced by the regular phrasing in the orchestra.

An interpretation according to the dramaturgical function of the *solita forma* yields analytic insights not necessarily apparent in Budden’s more descriptive account. And even though Falstaff’s “Honor” monologue does not strictly adhere to the conventions of the *solita forma* (the poetic meter does not change and the sections are insufficiently self-contained), it is clearly rooted in them. Wittingly or not, Verdi seems to have employed these conventions to subtly trace the progression of Falstaff’s thought across the course of the monologue, the most lyrical and most formally coherent sections coinciding with points of Falstaff’s emotional and mental stability and the least lyrical sections coinciding with comparable points of instability.

¹⁸ Budden, III:457.

¹⁹ Ibid., 454.

Scott Balthazar has shown that the Rossinian formal model for arias and duets evolved considerably during the course of the nineteenth century, pointing particularly to the breakdown of the distinction between unambiguously static and kinetic sections in Verdi's middle and late operas.²⁰ Nevertheless, after having structured—in varying degrees—most of his operas through *Aida* according to the conventions of the *solita forma*, it seems unlikely that for his final two masterworks, *Otello* and *Falstaff*, Verdi would have completely abandoned them. Tracing the vestiges of the *solita forma* in Verdi's late operas cannot only deepen our appreciation of the dramatic sense of those works, it can also strengthen our understanding of their ties to a long and successful musical-historical tradition.

20 See Scott L. Balthazar, *Evolving Conventions in Italian Serious Opera: Scene Structure in the Works of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi, 1810-1850* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1985); idem, "The Primo Ottocento Duet and the Transformation of the Rossinian Code," *Journal of Musicology* 7 (1989): 471-497; and idem, "Analytic Contexts and Mediated Influences: The Rossinian *Convenienze* and Verdi's Middle and Late Duets," *Journal of Musicological Research* 10 (1990): 19-46.

a Ful-gi-da A-li-ce! a-mor t'off-ro

a' Ful-gi-da Megl' a-mor t'off-ro... a-mor bra-mo.

x non do-man-dar per-chè, ma dùm-mi l'a-mo.

x' ...seri la ga-ia co-ma-re il com-par-ga io son i-o e fra noi

due... fac-cia-mo il pa-ia io.

b/b' Fac-cia-mo il pa-ia... in un a-mor ri-den-te di don-na bel-la e d'uom ap-pa-ri-scen-te

c *dolcissimo* *p* e il vi-so tu-o su me ri-splen-de-rà co-me u-na stel-la co-me u-na stel-la sul l'im-men-si-tà. *senza misura parlato* Ri-spon-di al tuo scu-

die-re. John Fal-staff Ca-va-lie-re.

Example 1. Composite setting of Falstaff's Letter

(adapted from the piano-vocal score of Giuseppe Verdi, *Falstaff*, Schirmer, pl. #45547, 1963)

ANDANTE ♩ = 66

Giunta all'Al - bergo della Giarrettie - - ra Chiedo d'esser am -
 Stepping in - side the Garter Inn to greet him I con-veyed my re -

ANDANTE ♩ = 66

(27) *p*

poco più animato

- messa alla presen - za del Cava - lier, se - gre - ta mes - sag - ge - ra. Sir John si
 - spects, on - ly to men - tion That I was sent by some - one else to greet him. Sir John at

mf poco più animato

(in a ponderous tone)

de - gna d'accordarmi u - dien - za, M'acco - glie tron - fio in fur - fante - sca
 once lent me his kind at - ten - tion. His wel - come tru - ly - be - spoke his vast di -

p

po - sa:
 - men - sion:

Example 2. *Falstaff* (Act II, Part 2), “Giunta all’albergo”, Mistress Quickly, rehearsal 27 (Schirmer, pl. #45547, 1963)

MENO MOSSO ♩ = 100

FAL li - gial nostro. lo stesso, sì, i.o, i.o, De.vo talor da un
own in per-il? Yes, I, Sirs. I. . . lis ten: I— have had to hide my

MENO MOSSO ♩ = 100

FAL la - to porre il timor di Di - o E, per neces - si -
glanc - es, ask - ing the grace of Heav - en, as in the throes of

FAL - tà,..... svi - ar l'o - no -
need I pawned my hon -

leggeriss.

FAL - - - re, u - sa - re stra - ta - gem - mi ed e -
or, sought ref - uge - in - some - guile - or - some de -

FAL - quivo - ci, destreggiar, bordeg - gia - re. E
- cep - tion, in a ruse or a false - hood And

Example 3. *Falstaff* (Act I, Part 1), “Devo talor da un lato,” Falstaff, 15 mm. after rehearsal 14 (Schirmer, pl. #45547, 1963)

pp

FAL

voi,..... coi vo-stri
you, de - crep - it

pp

f

FAL

cen - ci e col l'oc - chia - ta
wretch - es, you stink - ing, vile hy -

fp e molto stacc.

FAL

tôr - ta da gat - to on par - do e i
-c nas, who feed - on car - rion, you

FAL

fe - ti - di sghi - gnaz - zi a - ve - te a
pu - tre - fied rap - scal - lions, You speak of

Example 3. (continued)

FAL

scor - ta il vo - stro Onor! Che o - no - re?! che o -
 hon - or ... and this to me? What hon - or? Speak

FAL

- nor? che o - nor! che cian - cia! che ba - ja!
 up! Come on, you id - iots, you ass - es!

FAL

tr

tr

ff

(in a pon
 MENO MOSSO

FAL

(15)
 MENO MOSSO